

LISTEN



A REVIEW of POETRY & CRITICISM
EDITED BY GEORGE HARTLEY

Vol. 3

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*There is no title in the original MS.

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LISTEN

EDITED BY GEORGE HARTLEY

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Volume Three

WINTER 1958

Number One

THE ROSE BUSH

Gerald Moore

There are two roses on my bush this morning,
Hanging slack in the damp air.
This close white mist is friendly to them
Cradling their faint exotic pink,
For when it lifts the sun will strike them pale.
Jostled by gaudy neighbours, exposed
To the angry tropical air,
Delicate aliens, they will seem as frail
As the girl perhaps who set them here —
Her English beauty washed and drained by the harsh light,
In a summer frock bent to her bulbs, worrying,
A wife not suited to the climate
Who shuddered at the sight of orchids.

ODE TO GROUCHO

Martin Bell

I

INVOCATION

Pindarick, a great gorbliney Ode
Soaring on buzzard wings, ornate,
Or tottering titanic on feet of clay,
It would have to be, to be adequate —
With the neo-Gromboolian over-tones
And the neo-classic gimmicks:
Pat gags cadenced from 'Mauberley'
In platinum-plated timing,
And tendrils convolvulating
To clutch the dirty cracks and hold the house up!

O flaking Palladian Palladium!
 On a backcloth rattled by oom-pah —
 All our nostalgias, Hey there! the old vaudeville circuit.
 Proscenium buttressed with brutal truths
 Chalk-white in the chastest diction,
 Where sleek myths lean in manneristic attitudes,
 Sequined with glittering metaphysicality.
 And massive ambiguities
 Endlessly rocking a whole way of life.

II PRESENCE

What you had was a voice
 To talk double-talk faster,
 Twanging hypnotic
 In an age of nagging voices —
 And bold eyes to dart around
 As you shambled supremely,
 Muscular moth-eaten panther!

Black eye-brows, black cigar,
 Black painted moustache —
 A dark code of elegance
 In an age of nagging moustaches —
 To discomfit the coarse mayor,
 Un-poise the suave head-master,
 Reduce all the old boys to muttering fury.

A hero for the young,
 Blame if you like the human situation —
 Subversivest of con-men
 In an age of ersatz heroes:
 Be talkative and shabby and
 Witty; bully the burgess;
 Act the obvious phoney.

III APOTHEOSIS

Slickness imposed on a rough beast,
 A slouching beast and hypochondriac.
 Great Anarch! Totem of the lot,
 All the shining rebels

(Prometheus, of course, and that old pauper
 Refusing cake from Marie Antoinette,
 And Baudelaire's fanatical toilette,
 And Rimbaud, striding off to Africa,
 And Auden, scowling at a cigarette . . .)

Bliss was it *etc.* Smartish but fair enough.
 We stammered out our rudenesses

O splendid and disreputable father!

TO CELEBRATE EDDIE CANTOR Martin Bell

The flesh is brittle, alas,
 And ever-modish time, that fiend, is slee:
 The Goldwyn Girls of Nineteen Thirty Three
 Also must go, must fade beyond nostalgia,
 Vanish when celluloid crackles.

That year, not less constrained,
 We strained the other way to find the future —
 Eager and awkward, tried to look sixteen,
 Be full initiates into the life of the time
 And shuffle into the LYRIC, the local flea-pit.
 We howled and whistled, fidgets on iron seats.

Our coming-in was brisk to music
 Strident through raucous light along the slanting floor,
 Underfoot rubbish and everywhere sweet disinfectant
 Stinking like LADIES and GENTLEMEN —
 The whole place blatant and blaring,
 Usherettes sullen and louts obstreperous.

And, slumping back in seats, to see a flick,
 Shadows to look at shadows, not expecting luck,
 Amazed then, caught in your outrageous joy,
 Dear Eddie!

Blank looming screen
 And then you whirled from its imagined wings —
 A small impassioned man who could hardly wait for his music,
 A master, from Vaudeville, an accomplished master.

Voice soaring in gleeful lubricity,
 Scandalous coloratura at full tilt!
 Excited wide eyes rolling
 And hands that have to clap that joy's too much.
 Energy, wanton small bright ball
 Leaping on top of the fountain —
 Living water, extravagant,
 Flooding and cleansing the movie-house.

No endless exits down the sad perspectives,
 The avenues of infinite regrets,
 For you, Sir, No Siree!
 Palmy Days, ample a blue sky
 And the gross bull lulled to an euphoric calm,
 Contented cows, O Don Sebastian —
 The lineaments of gratified desire
 Making whoopee with the whooping red-skins.

Thinly we rustled, ears of unripe corn —
 You could have gathered us up in the palms of your hands.
 Singing and dancing, you came out more than real,
 Potent Revivalist, strong drink for shadows —
 For you at the end of the picture
 Bunches and baskets of flowers, all of them girls.

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT SEBASTIAN

Geoffrey Hill

HOMAGE TO HENRY JAMES

' But then face to face '

Naked, as if for swimming, the martyr
 Catches his death in a little flutter
 Of plain arrows. A grotesque situation,
 But priceless, and harmless to the nation.

Consider such pains ' crystalline ': then fine art
 Persists where most crystals accumulate.
 History can be scraped clean of its old price.
 Engrossed in the cold blood of sacrifice,

The provident and self-healing gods
 Destroy only to save. Well-stocked with foods,
 Enlarged and deep-oiled, America
 Detects music, apprehends the day-star

Where, sensitive and half-under a cloud,
 Europe muddles her dreaming, is loud
 And critical beneath the varied domes
 Resonant with tribute and with commerce.

THE LOWLANDS OF HOLLAND Geoffrey Hill

Europe, the much-scarred, much-scoured terrain,
 Its attested liberties, home-produce,
 Labelled and looking up, invites use,
 Stuffed with artistry and substantial gain :

Shrunk, magnified — (nest, holocaust) —
 Not half innocent and not half undone;
 Profiting from custom : its replete strewn
 Cities such ample monuments to lost

Nations and generations : its cultural
 Or trade skeletons such hand-picked bone :
 Flaws in the best, revised science marks down :
 Witness many devices; the few natural

Corruptions, graftings; witness classic falls;
 (The dead subtracted; the greatest resigned;)
 Witness earth fertilised, decently drained,
 The sea decent again behind walls.

A PASTORAL

Geoffrey Hill

Mobile, immaculate and austere,
 The Pities, their fingers in every wound,
 Assess the injured on the obscured frontier;
 Cleanse with a kind of artistry the ground
 Shared by War. Consultants in new tongues
 Prove synonymous our separated wrongs.

We celebrate, fluently and at ease.
 Traditional Furies, having thrust, hovered,
 Now decently enough sustain Peace.

The unedifying nude dead are soon covered.
Survivors, still given to wandering, find
Their old loves, painted and re-aligned —

Queer, familiar, fostered by superb graft
On treasured foundations, these ideal features!
Men can move with purpose again, or drift,
According to direction. Here are statues
Darkened by laurel; and evergreen names;
Evidently-veiled griefs; impervious tombs.

ELEGIAC STANZAS

Geoffrey Hill

ON A VISIT TO DOVE COTTAGE

(To J. P. Mann)

Mountains, monuments, all forms
Inured to processes and storms
(And they are many); the fashions
Of intercourse between nations:

Customs through which many come
To sink their eyes into a room
Filled with the unused and unworn;
To bite nothings to the bone:

And the daylight between facts;
And the daylight between acts;
Groping of custom towards love;
Past loving, the custom to approve:

A use of words; a rhetoric
As plain as spitting on a stick;
Speech from the ice, the clear-obscure;
The tongue broody in the jaw:

Greatly-aloof, alert, rare
Spirit, conditioned to appear
At the authentic stone or seat:
O near-human spouse and poet,

Mountains, rivers and grand storms,
Continuous profit, grand customs
(And many of them): O Lakes, Lakes!
O Sentiment upon the rocks!

HIDDEN PERSUADERS

Donal  Davie

Frontiers of France in the
 New World: *concr te*
 Music, a function
 Of electronics, tunes
 A modern miracle of
 Engineering. Char's
 Language as gesture lauds
 Sedan, convertible
 To nothing but
 Miracle. The lie
 Known for a lie, the plug
 As action or
 Its better surrogate
 Excites the fantasy.
 Before perhaps proud owners
 Of either sex of
 Cadillac's crimson beds,
 Whose long convertible
 Endeavour (Soaked soutanes
 Cross the Ohio) served
 God and the King. His name,
 Machine whose multi-purpose
 Less the consumer
 Inflames than the engineer,
 The rhetorician, serves
 Itself, not even sales.

Pontiac fires Detroit.
 Action paints and language
Concr te New France recovers.
 On Fort Duquesne afresh
 The immaculate lilies. Turn,
 Minavavana or
 The Grand Sauteur, and see
 Behind the trader's knife
 Plunging, *coureurs de bois*
 Roll through the fired stockade
 The unmentionable chapter —
 Extermination of the Seminole,
 Deportation of the Cherokee,
 Transportation of the Saginaw —

Mentionable, incessantly
 Convertible to names
 That are themselves, and mean
 Nothing, language as action.

ANECDOTE OF TRANSITIONS Donald Davie

Against the degrees
 The Chinese
 robes of office
 The scarlet, the saffron grades,

The sage has put on
 Dresses the sun
 discolours, fades;
 Less firmly structured
 and softer shades
 Of white light fractured
 Or disintegrated;
 Indigo, violet —
 So womanish his
 abstracted habit.

Challenged, 'This hue
 Is it, for you
 right?'
 The master
 remarks on light

The light of mind:

'Never so abstract
 So refined
 a thought, but faster
 Hue there inheres
 Than day
 can bleach, can master.'

AGAINST CONFIDENCES

Donald Davie

Loose lips now
 Call candour friend
 Whom candour's brow,
 When clear, contemned.

Candour can live
 Within no shade
 That our compulsive
 Needs have made

On couches where
 We sleep, confess,
 Couple and share
 A pleased distress.

Not to dispense
 With privacies,
 But reticence
 His practice is;

Agreeing where
 Is no denial,
 Not to spare
 One truth from trial,

But to respect
 Conviction's plight
 In intellect's
 Hard equal light.

Not to permit,
 To shy belief
 Too bleakly lit,
 The shade's relief

Clouds candour's brow,
 But to indulge
 These mouths that now
 Divulge, divulge.

LOVES OF THE PUPPETS Richard Wilbur

Meeting when all the world was in the bud,
Drawn each to each by instinct's wooden face,
These lovers, heedful of the mystic blood,
Fell glassy-eyed into a hot embrace.

April, unready to be so intense,
Marked time while these outstripped the gentle weather,
Yielded their natures to insensate sense,
And flew apart the more they came together.

Where did they fly? Why, each through such a storm
As may be conjured in a globe of glass
Drove on the colder as the flesh grew warm,
In breathless haste to be at lust's impasse,

To cross the little bridge and sink to rest
In visions of the snow-occluded house
Where languishes, unfound by any guest,
The perfect, small, asphyxiated spouse.

That blizzard ended, and their eyes grew clear,
And there they lay exhausted yet unsated.
Why did their features run with tear on tear
Until their looks were individuated?

One peace implies another, and they cried
For want of love as if their souls would crack,
Till, in despair of being satisfied,
They vowed at least to share each other's lack;

Then maladroitly they embraced once more,
And hollow rang to hollow with a sound
That tuned the brooks more sweetly than before,
And made the birds explode for miles around.

VERSIONS FROM FYODOR TYUTCHEV

(1803-1873)

Charles Tomlinson

To Henry Gifford whose collaboration made these possible

SUMMER STORM

The dust sweeps by — summer
 Rumbles in storm behind it,
 Bursts out of ravaged clouds
 To smear the blue, to charge
 Impetuous on the wood, where tremors break
 Loud in its stir and wilderness of leaves . . .

Wood giants bow
 As if a heel, unseen
 Had spurned them down.
 Alarmed, their murmuring tops
 Conspire for safety, while
 Under unbroken birdsong
 Through the sudden skirmish,
 Spins to the road the first and yellow leaf . . .

Entering autumn, there ensues
 (Its beauty is in brevity)
 A season of crystalline repose,
 Still day with clarid dusk . . .

Steady incursion of the blade
 Lets space into the crop:
 Emptiness over all, save where
 Cobweb on idle furrow
 Stretches its gleam of subtle-hair.

Birdless, the vacant atmosphere;
 But the first tempests lie
 Folded, as liquid, mild
 Warm-blue keeps winter from the resting field.

UNDER MONT BLANC

Blue congregation of Genevan waters,
The north dies down; your swan
Steers out in ripples. Calm
And the first sail enters it.

Daylong, the tree tints glitter
And the sun restores
Beneath the wandering and solicitous airs
An after-summer, cherishes
The foliage against its fall.

Summit, its cloud-coat stripped;
Peace in the light's regeneration —
Heart could affirm
Were there at home one grave the less
The mountain's white and tranquil revelation.

THREE POETS

Poems, Anthony Cronin. (Cresset Press, 9/6.)

Errors of Observation, Gordon Wharton. (Reading University School of Art, 6/-.)

A Winter Talent and other poems, Donald Davie. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 10/6.)

To say a writer has created 'a world of his own' is usually just a lazy platitude. We might answer that we do not want any world but the one we live in, and that what we demand of a poet is a few good poems about it. Nevertheless, there is something to it. The best writers have, if not created, at least *cornered* a part of the world to explore intensively — that part being a particular kind of experience or concept or emotion; and when we find poets like Victor Hugo or Richard Wilbur who hop from subject to subject, treating each in a different though perhaps accomplished way, we have a right to suspect that on closer examination we may find they have not said anything very interesting about any of them. It is true that all one demands is a few good poems — as if this were so little — but none of them can be a fluke, each is brought about by a converging of intentions which may have been in the writer's mind for years.

This sense — that a writer in separate and unrelated poems is concentrating on a series of related preoccupations — is perhaps only a preliminary impression, but it can be at the least a pointer to his promise, because it shows that there is a seriousness and consistency to him similar to Donne's, Baudelaire's, or Stevens'. And it is an impression that is not

necessarily weakened by our awareness of his indebtedness to other writers; for he may use an influence in one of two ways: as a substitute for his own attitude and style, or as a means of discovering them.

I bring in this last point because it is particularly relevant to Anthony Cronin and Gordon Wharton, both of whom are in their first collections fairly heavily indebted to Auden. Auden must be, as far as direct imitation of style goes, the most influential poet of the century—and for obvious reasons: his casual and topical manner, in which any subject can be discussed with equal assurance, is obviously attractive to anyone learning how to write. The two poets, however, make rather different uses of his influence.

In Mr Cronin's *Surprise* we read

In one room on the ceiling is a stain.

Someone is missing who should be around.

This is rather pleasantly in Auden's manner of portentous mystery, but all it leads up to at the end of the poem is 'Although we say I love you no one cares', which carries Auden's device of brusque generality to a sentimental extreme. Another poem, *Small Hours*, has an obvious relation to *September 1, 1939*, and wears its borrowings rather smartly to begin with, but again Mr Cronin retreats from his fine model into sentimentality, ending this time with

And they sleep in the widening dawn

Of a world which does not care.

'Nobody loves me' is a difficult attitude to bring off successfully in a poem: the mere statement is rather sickening, and it is hard to see how it can lead to any more general statement of great significance. He does come nearer to the universal in another poem, *Apology*, with the line 'Thief calling to thief with no Christ in between'—an image worthy of Camus—but coming at the end of the poem it cannot be developed; and it does little to resolve the poem it ends.

The Auden influence on Cronin is at its worst when he deals with abstractions. Abstractions are, of course, a necessary part of our language and so of poetry, but they must be defined and supported as rigidly in poetry as in prose. Mr Cronin, for example, often refers to 'love' in the generalising way that Auden does, but we never know clearly what kind of love it is—married, religious, lecherous, or some sort of Whitmanian compassion.

It is easy to criticise somebody by means of influence-tracing, perhaps, and it can be misleading because it may not tell the whole truth about him. But I don't think it is too misleading with Mr Cronin's work: the first poem in his book, *For a Father*, is probably the best, for we can read it without hearing echoes of another man's voice, but it is one of the few exceptions, and I feel that his world—pleasant as it may be—is still only a small part of Auden's.

It looks at first as if the same statement could be made about Gordon Wharton, when we start reading such things as

See this evening the marvellous hawk amazes

The screaming sparrow, the petulant, grounded boy . . .

The debt to Auden is quite as extreme as Mr Cronin's, and at points seems almost ludicrous. But there is a good deal more to Mr Wharton than his influences. Reading the book through for the first time, I was really stopped short by *The Vultures*: its subject resembles that of *The Witles*, and it certainly has its echoes —

Who, do you think, was there to put things right

With the outraged father, the strict platoon commander?

but at the same time there is a vigour of conception about the poem that makes it Mr Wharton's own. It is like Auden in the same conscious way as the seventeenth century poets are like Juvenal and Horace when they are 'imitating' them. And several of the other poems have an energy and an at present awkward assertiveness by which we can see Mr Wharton preparing to push out from the Known World of Auden to find his own. With *Through the French Windows*, in fact, it looks as though the break has been almost achieved:

You see, Cardea, how they go out of doors,
She to the summer-house, he to the wicket gate,
And turn away gently with perhaps one word.
Over this occasion you cannot preside;
The garden, not the house, produced these spores
Which only in their parting germinate.
When the gate shuts it scares away a bird,
An incident all your squeaking cannot elide.

And crucial flowers will detain this second

Always, where clever mirrors would give it distance . . .

The movement, hesitant as the people described, and the careful use of language both contribute to a feeling that is directly between Mr Wharton and his subject, with no Audenesque intermediary.

Donald Davie's new book, *A Winter Talent*, gives us a world that is being settled even as it is explored, and the influences have already been superseded. It is a pity that the most quoted poem in the collection should be *Rejoinder to a Critic*, which is not by any means the best or most interesting. The reason that it has been pounced upon as typical is that its style is nearer than most of the rest to that of his earlier book, *Brides of Reason*. Mr Davie has the reputation of being 'cerebral' (see the brief dismissal of him in Geoffrey Moore's recent British Council pamphlet), with all the accompaniments of prissy limitation suggested by that word; and this poem appears cerebral all right — after all, it is a rejection of emotion. I would like to examine it, however, simply *because* it is reminiscent of the earlier poems he has got so far beyond in *A Winter Talent*. First, it should be noticed that the attitude it takes not only to the critic he is addressing but to its own style is ironic; when he speaks of the 'liking for collage' which it evidences he is, after all, being slightly disparaging. And the statement of the poem is deliberately exaggerated. Some critic has evidently said that the only question Mr Davie cares to discuss is 'how can I dare to feel?' and he proceeds to answer the critic

Continued on page 19

A NOTE ON EDWARD THOMAS AND 'ELUNED'

GORDON BOTTOMLEY lived at Silverdale, which is only a few miles from my home town. Since the Wordsworthian era the Lake Country has been a nursery of strong literary fidelities, and at the age of seventeen I was introduced to Gordon by a friend. For the next thirty years he extended to me the benefit of (I cannot resist quoting Patmore, a poet whose austere gratifications Gordon revealed to me) his 'great and gracious ways.'

From the outset of our acquaintance Gordon entertained a staunch and lovable — and in my opinion entirely baseless — persuasion that my brash rhymes had some affinity with the secure goodness of Thomas's. Gordon's house was the Sheiling, perched eyrie-like on a limestone outcrop in 'a land of stone all worn like ancient stairs,' as Thomas described it, and there Gordon would speak of his lost friend: Edward the vagabond, 'dropping in' from the ends of England with conscientious unexpectedness; Edward the subtle connoisseur of Welsh folk-song; Edward the poet; Edward the critic ('he knew,' said Gordon with quiet positiveness, 'more about English poetry than anyone else'); and Edward — generally. All who knew them are at one in their testimony that between these men — so disparate in outlook and circumstance — there flourished a 'marriage of true minds'. Their relationship, I gathered, was serene. Of Edward's 'dark mood', not so much moodily as Mudiely commemorated in two below-stairs novelettes, Gordon was indignantly ignorant. In fact his references to these confections came as near to rancour as his native benignity would allow. For my part, to be in communion with a choice and master spirit, and through him with another of like stature, was a privileged experience.

In view of his chronic, albeit witty invalidism, which confined him to the hinterlands of literary culture, the circle of Gordon's acquaintance was surprisingly wide, and into it he recklessly precipitated me. It was Gordon under whose affectionate tyranny Clifford Bax published verses of mine in a baronial quarterly such as would not survive five minutes in our Well-Fed State. It was Gordon who instructed the Woolfs to print my first book, which in a fit of absent-mindedness they did, and it sold like cold cakes. It was Gordon who lavished himself on a foreword to a later collection, a foreword so nobly generous as to verge upon philanthropy. In short — without Gordon behind me I should have got nowhere. (It was no fault of his that even with him behind me I still got nowhere.) From internal evidence I have

reason to think that similar offices were accorded to Edward.

'Eluned', which Gordon transcribed for me from the original manuscript, was composed in adolescence. It compares curiously with the *fin de siècle* prose which Edward was writing at the time, characterised by that very 'dimness and lack of concreteness' from which he was later to recoil. To be sure, the elusive but familiar and distinctive tone of the adult is not to be found in the prentice utterance. Nevertheless, something of his mature practice is foreshadowed: in the frugality and off-handedness of epithet, in the relaxed conversational rhythms, in the sense of 'the dearest freshness deep down things' which dwells in so much of his work — so charmingly in 'Sowing', so fulfilling in 'The Manor Farm'.

Intrinsic merit apart, any accretion to the comparatively slender corpus of an artist of Edward's rank must be in the nature of an event. Moreover, the poem has an additional claim upon our attention in that its existence rebukes the fallacious assumption that its author wrote no verse until his late thirties. True that the impact of Robert Frost was crucial and fructifying. But when, in his new-found creative excitement, Edward wrote to W. H. Hudson, 'I had done no verses before, and did not expect to,' the statement was obviously more summary than exact.

Stanley Snaith

The photograph

Taken 30 November, 1916, on Thomas's last leave. He was killed at Arras the following April. G. B. said he had reason to think this was the last photograph taken of him.

I am almost certain it has never been reproduced anywhere; in fact it is the only copy I have seen.

S. S.

Edward Thomas

She is dead, Eluned,*
Whom the young men and the old men
And the old women and even the young women
Came to the gates in the village
To see, because she walked as beautifully as a heifer.

She is dead, Eluned,
Who sang the new songs
And the old; and made the new
Seem old, and the old
As if they were just born and she had christened them.

She is dead, Eluned,
Whom I admired and loved,
When she was gathering red apples,
When she was making cakes and bread,
When she was smiling to herself alone and not thinking of me.

She is dead, Eluned,
Who was part of Spring,
And of blue Summer and red Autumn,
And made the Winter beloved:
She is dead, and these things come not again.

*El-ee-ned



by rejecting *all* feeling as approximate, uncontrolled, indiscriminate, and thus dangerous:

Love's radio-active fall-out on a large

Expanse around the point it bursts above.

He ends with advice that is presumably addressed to himself as well:

... Be dumb!

Appear concerned only to make it scan!

How dare we now be anything but numb?

Instead of feeling, there is the task of appearing to make the poem scan — an occupation which we can interpret in several ways: it could be to quietly consolidate one's small gains, it could be the concern of a Knight of Infinite Resignation, or it could be simply playing safe. But the word 'appearing' surely suggests a better interpretation: *appearing* to do this is the most one can hope to accomplish — it is a discipline by means of which it is possible to come to terms with emotion. The very emphasis on the need for discipline is also an acknowledgment of the presence of the emotion it is to control. So much for the merely cerebral Davie.

The caution demanded in the poem is a bit exaggerated, but it does help to explain the relation between Davie's two books. Much of *Brides of Reason* was evidently in the nature of a preliminary exercise, an exercise in the rigorous disciplining of emotion, and its faults seem to derive from this fact: the often rather mechanical use of the iambic line, and the stiff ironies ('But Rider Haggard rode along the fell'). In *A Winter Talent* there is, first and most obviously, a loosening up of techniques; secondly, an easier assurance of tone; and thirdly, a much greater trust in feeling, which is defined — as feeling must be — by the limits he sets to it. There is also a wider range of subjects than he has been credited with: as one can tell by the fact that in the second poem he claims Brutus, Pushkin, and Strindberg as his 'types of an ideal virtue'. These are not chaps of the Movement.

It is difficult to give a clear and just account of this book rather as it must have been for the first reviewers of Wallace Stevens' *Harmonium*. I will say straight away that I consider it to be without question one of the most important books to appear since the war: Davie has developed an idiom that is new — at any rate, to our generation in England — in its combination of disciplined concentration, poise, seriousness, and connotative richness. Further, in the characteristic poems here, meaning is conveyed in a very special way — not by direct concepts nor by direct symbols (though he uses both of these successfully at times) so much as by a mixture of the two, a conceptual use of the symbol and a symbolic use of the concept.

I realise that my last sentence sounds like one of the obscurer asides from a practitioner of criticism for criticism's sake, so I would like to elucidate by giving a couple of examples of his most successful use of this method.

Hearing Russian Spoken begins:

Unsettled again and hearing Russian spoken

I think of brokenness perversely planned

By Dostoievsky's debauchees; recall
 The 'visible brokenness' that is the token
 Of the true believer; and connect it all
 With speaking a language I cannot command.

'Brokenness' is fairly obviously the word on which the poem hinges. Davie associates three ideas with the concept of brokenness, which is initially a sort of pun on the guttural sound of Russian and the use of the word 'broken' in a phrase like 'broken English'. He applies this concept to, first, methods of sensuality; secondly, the 'true believer's' vision; and thirdly, a language which the poet can speak but 'cannot command'. Language can be regarded as a symbol of action; thus its 'brokenness' becomes the symbol for a particular mode of existence. But not an arbitrary symbol in the way that many of Yeats' symbols are. Hart Crane in one of his letters speaks of the city, which was for him one of the symbols of Romantic experience, as 'a place of brokenness, of drama; and when a certain development in this intensity is reached a new stage is created, or must be, arbitrarily, or there is a foreshortening, a loss and a premature disintegration of experience.' It is not fortuitous that both Crane and Davie have (I assume) independently coined the same word for the same concept. 'Brokenness' is accurate in its description of Davie's meaning, but it simultaneously retains its symbolic meaning throughout the poem. Davie sees himself as, being human, 'wretched enough' and inevitably attracted by brokenness, yet as following certain disciplines that keep him from it: he cannot 'drink to drown a sorrow, / Or write in metres that I cannot scan.' The poem ends:

Not just in Russian but in any tongue
 Abandonment, morality's soubrette
 Of lyrical surrender and excess,
 Knows the weak endings equal to the strong;
 She trades on broken English with success
 And, disenchanted, I'm enamoured yet.

Or one could take the equally excellent *The Wind at Penistone* to illustrate the method. Here the important words are 'edge' and 'reserves'. After establishing wind, hill, and street, he says

The wind reserves, the hill reserves, the style
 Of building houses on the hill reserves
 A latent edge;

which we can do without
 In Pennine gradients and the Pennine wind,
 And never miss or, missing it, applaud
 The absence of the aquiline . . .

'Reserves' later becomes, again punningly, a noun. The *absence of 'edge'* starts as a simple description of the rounded slopingness of the landscape, and then becomes a symbol of the "clenched and muffled style". No sooner does it become this, however, than it is treated as if it were at the same time a concept — from being opposed to the concept of 'reserves'; and meanwhile 'reserves', by the influence of this opposition to a symbol-concept, itself becomes a concept-symbol.

This method of writing enables the maximum feeling to exist side by side with the maximum logic. But it does not make for easy reading, and I suspect its difficulty is the reason that some reviewers have thrown up their hands in despair and chosen to define Mr Davie by the characteristics of his first book.

It is true that in certain of the poems here we feel a certain obscurity: sometimes this may result from confusion in the writing, but sometimes I think it comes from the fact that the reader is not yet accustomed to the method. The chief difficulty comes when we do not know the exact proportions Mr Davie is allotting to symbol and concept. For example with the words 'cold' and 'stinks' in *Samuel Beckett's Dublin*, I find the amount of moral and literal meaning extremely hard to make out. Similarly, *Mens Sana in Corpore Sano* calls up all sorts of questions, though it may be because not enough of the situation on which the poem is based is clear to me. The biggest of these questions occurs with the last stanza:

You know the Stoic's one indulgence now,
The wrist that, opened, bleeds into the bath
Crimsoning Time's still water — yet with blood
(The Epicurean's boast) no violence
Has loosed upon yourself, beyond
That something less than suicidal forcing,
The acceleration of the chemistries
Of undeflected change. Prepare to open
All of the body's avenues but its veins.

Though Lean-shanks, to whom the poem is addressed, is in a literal bath, the suicide is evidently not literal. But I am not able to grasp the course of action similar to it (opening the body's avenues) which is recommended — in spite of the fact that the avenues of the body have been referred to in the previous stanza.

From the obscurity of this, or of *Under St Paul's* (where the allegorical machinery — though reasonably clear, taken bit by bit — is too cumbersome to be held in a single human head at the same moment), it is a relief to turn to poems like the two I spoke of earlier, or to the lucidity of *Under a Skylight*, *The Mushroom Gatherers*, or *Time Passing, Beloved*. *The Mushroom Gatherers*, which is subtitled 'after Mickiewicz' — by which I take it to be more Davie's work than Mickiewicz's — is remarkable for the control over emotion not so much by logic as by restraint of language and movement, resulting in a sort of chastely exotic quality which is found in some of the other poems on a smaller scale.

Strange walkers! See their processional
Perambulations under low boughs,
The birches white, and the green turf under.
These should be ghosts by moonlight wandering.

And the success of *Time Passing, Beloved*, of which the language is so simple that it constantly verges on the trite, is due to a similar grave control over movement, by which the words are made to literally move us.

Perhaps it will be clear now why I make large claims for Davie.

He is concerned with style in the most important sense—i.e. as an instrument for the examination of experience. The poems are related by their all being part of the same exploration undertaken by the same man: an exploration and at the same time a definition of values. Even the slighter and less successful poems are worth careful reading in this context. The world is his, but it is worth understanding so that we may understand our own better.

Thom Gunn

THE POET'S ROLE

Brutus's Orchard, Roy Fuller. (Deutsch, 12/6.)

MR ROY FULLER has long functioned as a kind of conscience in English poetry. Of the generation which first emerged just before the war he was the only considerable writer to follow the early 'thirties school in its preoccupations and allegiances. His wartime poetry, thoughtful and uneasy, observed wartime life and foreign places through the same sensitive lens. And the two post-war volumes of 1949 (*Epitaphs* and *Occasions*) and 1954 (*Counterparts*) showed him still keeping to these humane and serious purposes, even when his models had abandoned theirs. There was, though, one essential difference between Mr Fuller's poetry and that of his seniors: Fuller was deliberately unambitious in the choice of themes, tracing a significant moral in minor, even mundane, human events, and making no large gestures. If his political seriousness was directed at the conscience of writers as thinking people within the context of our Cold War culture, his disquieting perception of the small, familiar details of human existence was an example to the poets who overlooked them in the hard search for worthy material.

Brutus's Orchard, however, marks a new stage in the development of Fuller's poetry, in two ways. First, he has suddenly managed to transcend the limiting nature of his themes—which, although distinctive and arresting, seemed at one time to promise only a small achievement. The customary topics—the incongruity of the poet in the technician's age, the sense of illuminating only a small area of existence—have been given a new dimension and developed confidently into something larger. And second, he has achieved a remarkable expansion of his technical resources. The longer poems in the second half of the book, including the 'Mythological Sonnets' show the extent of the change. 'At a Warwickshire Mansion' is concerned with the inability of poetry to contain human society within some ideal framework; whereas painting can sometimes manage it, and could in this particular case preserve at least the fine sight of the trees on an autumn afternoon. In the third of the five impressive verses, Fuller takes a poet's closer look at the house and builds up to a last line of Yeatsian eloquence:

In the dank garden of the ugly house

A group of leaden statuary perspires;

Moss grows between the ideal rumps and paps
 Cast by the dead Victorian; the mouse
 Starves behind massive panels; paths relapse
 Like moral principles; the surrounding shires
 Darken beneath the bombers' crawling wings,
 The terrible simplifiers jerk the strings.

And at the end, what seems at first to be a conclusion of deliberate bathos turns out to be a halting irony, and an affirmation of the enduring value of poetry:

I have been acting
 The poet's role for quite as long as I
 Can, at a stretch, without it being exacting:
 I must return to less ephemeral
 Affairs — to those controlled by love and power;
 Builders of realms, their tenants for an hour.

I know of few poems which catch so successfully the sense of menace lurking under the surface of post-war life; or underline so skilfully the ambiguous position of the poet with values and a conscience in an unstable world. Very nearly as good are 'The Perturbations of Uranus', a moving comment on the relationship between 'the learned men' and the masses for which they plan, and 'A Song between Two Shepherds', where the First Shepherd argues the case for effort and hopefulness — as does the surprise conclusion of 'Discrepancies'.

Last come the 'Mythological Sonnets'; and these contain the justification of Fuller's persistence with a vocabulary, and with terms of reference, which could have confined him permanently to worthy minor verse. 'Mythological' is a loose term: pre-history and modern life, as well as the ancient world, are included in the sequence. But the connecting theme is that 'The myths are here', are relevant to our own everyday experience and knowledge.

Ourselves have seen Prometheus steal
 The fire the overlords denied to man,
 Which act enchained him to Caucasian rocks.
 We still await the hero that must free
 The great conception whose ambiguous plan
 At once brought to the world its evil box
 And the sole chance to share felicity.

Possessing the wide view and the generous compassion of major poetry, this sequence fulfils the promise of 'thirties verse in a way in which the later work of certain poets of that period has failed to do. It might be interesting, by way of an experiment, to try reading them at the same time as the 'Bucolics' of W. H. Auden.

Alan Brownjohn

DOING WHAT COMES NATURALLY

The Talking Skull, James Reeves. (Heinemann, 12/6.)

The One-eyed Gunner, Robert Beloof. (Villiers Publications Ltd.,
Ingestre Road, London, N.W.5, 10/-.)

I HAVE never met an enthusiast for the poetry of James Reeves; but I've never met anyone, who knew his poems, who didn't respect them and him. The same is true of the late Norman Cameron, and *The Talking Skull* is dedicated to Cameron's memory. Both Cameron and Reeves are more or less of the party of Robert Graves, and the shame-faced respect we give them has something to do with their having persisted quietly, like Graves himself, through a long period of being overshadowed in the public mind by flashier and often shoddier talents. It's no secret, either, that Reeves is like Graves in having nothing but impatience for the accepted or academic canon of great English poets of the past, and himself honours a quite different though not invariable canon, which most of us, I suppose, find eccentric — Burns and Clare as the great Romantic poets, for instance, rather than Wordsworth or Byron or Keats; and Pope as, at best, 'a classic of our prose'. But Reeves's canon, if eccentric, is not irrational. He still finds it possible to set 'natural' over against 'artificial' as criteria for the reading and writing of poetry; and accordingly he takes his bearings from the naturalness of anonymous folk-poetry and of those poets — Burns, Clare, Hardy — who can be seen to maintain the tie with this anonymous tradition.

In terms of style, what distinguishes the poets of this kind is (for obvious reasons, having to do with originally oral transmission) a much greater reliance on rhythm and what earlier critics called 'the fable', that is to say, the single narrative or emblematic image composed by a whole poem, than on diction of the sort we recognise in Shakespeare or Pope, which throws out images as it goes along, moving from one to another and composing a poem as the constellation which the images make together. With one notable exception, this describes the style of all the poems in *The Talking Skull*. The exception is the section called 'Pygmies and Hippocamp' from the remarkable experimental poem called 'Letter before a Journey':

In that bad land I habited with pygmies,
Pygmies who deemed each other and themselves
Giants, and lay with pygmy girls of twelve,
Sweating to bring their labours to a climax,
While the girls giggled and imagined food,
For pygmy girls are noted for their greed.
They eat each other's babies in their need,
Done to a nice brown and basted with sugar.
The bald and tattered vultures in the trees
Cry 'Devils, devils, devils!' to deaf ears
And in their brackish lakes the hippocamp,

Metempsychosis surely of some we knew,
 The artful female hippocamp
 Mothers upon her mate
 Two hundred young which he, for drudge,
 Pregnant with his own brood, drops in due time
 To prance and dangle in the thirsty brine.
 Whose eyes wept such oases? Never mine.

What is distinctive here is not the wit (though that too is seldom found elsewhere) but the perpetual surprise, almost from line to line, as we move from pygmies to vultures to hippocamps. Readers for whom this surprisingness is one of the principal pleasures of poetry will look for it in vain elsewhere in this volume. In general, much less is going on at the level of diction, just as much less is going on at this level in Clare or in a folksong than in Pope or Shakespeare. It is an element in poetry which we may particularly value, but there is plenty of evidence that it is not a *sine qua non*, any more than wit is, however much nowadays we conspire to think it is. (Reeves runs into trouble only when the English language contrives to be more surprising than he intends or realises:

The moon in many guises ruled him. Green
 And smiling nature led his feet astray.
 He was the vagrant watcher in the shade,
 The ruminant amidst the woodland scene.

Did Reeves intend the pun on 'ruminant' which makes of Clare momentarily a cow chewing the cud? If so the wit is out of keeping with the convention established by the rest of the poem; and I suspect that this shows the language being surprising, not the poet.)

What we get in compensation for the lack of surprises is a pleasure nowadays so rare that one fears many readers are incapable of recognising it; it is the musical pleasure of traditional metre, meaningful and audacious variation on a fixed norm:

MAN OVERBOARD

'Man overboard!' was not heard at his fall
 Somewhere between the south pole and the north
 Into the black water quietly near midnight.
 There was no lifebuoy nor lifebelt dropped for him.
 Those who had waved him off at embarkation
 Motoring home from port convoyed by gulls
 Had settled down without him weeks ago
 Nor expected, sundered by leagues, to hear from him.
 Those who would greet the liner and receive him
 Had not yet got to readjusting rooms.

So that his life was now an unread book —
 His chance evasion of sharks, his long descent
 Into unfathomed cubic miles of silence —
 His was a tale he might or might not tell
 If ever the saving sail broke his horizon
 And his brown hand shocked from forgetfulness

Those who had reassumed their lives without him.
 The exploration of his personal forests
 Might be a theme for nightfalls of indulgence.

By my scansion there is only one line here, the third, which is not an iambic pentameter; and the norm thus firmly established, though with inventive variation from line to line, can accommodate the whole irregular line as just another and startlingly beautiful variation. The sixth line, incidentally, is a good example of Reeves's capacity for the Audenesque image at its most beautiful, adapted so smoothly into such a different convention that there can be no question of the echo being betraying.

But what are these poems *about*? Readers of Martin Seymour-Smith's tribute to Norman Cameron in the last *Listen* will find that what has to be allowed to Cameron must be allowed to Reeves also. In particular we must agree to distrust 'the public theme' and must suppose that the terms 'major' and 'minor' have no meaning. Like Cameron as Seymour-Smith presents him, Reeves has one theme which crowds out nearly every other—the tension in his own life between his destiny as a private individual and his destiny as a poet. (The pygmies and hippocamps, for instance, surely represent on one level—and that the most obvious—kinds of poets.) The relation between the poet and his destiny is often seen in terms that recall Graves's White Goddess; and there is a sort of unity to the collection in the fascinating though perhaps unplanned progression throughout, from the muse seen in the guise of Cophetua's beggarmaid or Persephone or the Queen of Elfland to the muse in the guise of the cruelly ambiguous artifact, the Aztec skull fashioned in crystal which gives its name to the title-poem standing last in the volume. (Note, for instance, 'Persephone in Hades', where Hell is seen under the semblance of a museum; yet it is the museum which furnishes the skull.) It is as if the poet had against his will been forced to accept artifice as a proper source for poems. It is perhaps only my prejudice, but it is at any rate my feeling, that this is a muse more serviceable than that come-day-go-day Queen of Elfland, a muse which could lift this poet to the possibility of major poems, out of a tradition which (apologies to Seymour-Smith) I persist in seeing as at this time of day irredeemably minor.

In America the devotees of 'doing what comes naturally' have found it necessary to throw over, not just the Shakespearean-Popian tradition of densely surprising language, but likewise the traditional disciplines (for instance of metrics) which James Reeves can endorse because he can find them in the anonymous folklore tradition as well as in the 'conscious artists'. In compensation or by reaction the academic poet in America characteristically uses a language denser with metaphor and allusion, more oblique and surprising and concentrated than anyone in Britain since Dylan Thomas died and Empson stopped publishing. Their *naifs* are more artless than ours, and their Alexandrians more artificial. And as a general rule one begins to attend to an American poet only when he shows some sign of mediating between these antithetical extremes.

Accordingly, we begin to attend to Robert Beloof quite soon, with the sixth poem of his collection :

THE CONDITION OF RECOVERY

Gone as soon as come
The wind that had blown him close on, eased,
Left this pulsing drift of family
About his bed to watch him beat off the white beach.

Under the blandishment
Of their unrigged dependent eyes, he stood.
A spell in bed had taken his breath away.
His legs shook as if hung in irons.

Broke over his heart
In a last wave, then, pity for self, and fear,
For he saw the load that the look of their eyes,
Helpless and straining, waited to shift to him.

He would, he felt, sink back.
Someday, anyway, he must go from them,
And now the paralysis heavy in him
Promised a rest before that final sleep,

And he looked to his wife
To find permission for it there, or else
A brute order to refuse, but saw such worth,
Unbusy, in her eyes, it was as if

A pearl-gray gull, scavenging
Serene through the dirty sky, in passing
Had harshly cried. Under that common pitiless
Voice, he steadied, stepped.

There can be little doubt from the first page that Beloof came to this point from the academic side of the fence, and there is a sequence of a dozen poems towards the end of his book, a section headed 'Memnon', which shows most of the worst traits of academic verse, whether British or American, in particular the intolerable knowingness, always tipping a wink to the reader, which comes of over-rating the importance, and misconceiving the nature, of poetic wit. But in 'The Condition of Recovery', the metaphorical density is no more and no less than what the humane feeling requires for its exact expression. The nautical metaphor throughout is sustained, even at the risky point of the daring 'unrigged' in the second stanza, without a hint of self-congratulating ingenuity: Beloof has his eye on the experience and the developing artifact, not at all upon the reader. The same can be said of the images, here not metaphorical but literally descriptive, in 'Scene Heading West'. It is humane feeling, straightforward sympathy, which most often effects this control, as in

'Son', a theme so raw and intimate as to discourage the most practised writer:

SON,

gulp the water, remount your trike,
hurl down the hill with no brake,
teeter around a two wheel corner
divinely spurning the yawning gutter;
no well will silt but your own pride,
drive dead-end but your private road,
gyro falter but your inner ear,
ditch deepen but your own chair.

Boy, now gone from sight, go well;
know of a fall, but fear no fall.

The Talking Skull is Reeves's fourth collection, *The One-eyed Gunner* is Beloo's first. Accordingly we find in the latter not a style, but a variety of styles, some that don't come off (e.g. the Frostian narrative, 'Madonna and Child'), others that do, like those illustrated. Even to attempt some of the styles argues intelligence and courage. It asks courage for instance even to attempt the style of Herrick, a poet at once unfashionable and dauntingly accomplished; yet Beloo not only attempts this, but also carries it off, in his 'Song for Ben Jonson'. Similarly, one cannot ask of Beloo's subject-matter what one asks of Reeves's; let it suffice to say that themes taken from human relationships must always be major, public and private at once.

Donald Davie

A NEW LYRICISM?

Like a Bulwark, Marianne Moore. (Faber and Faber, 10/6.)

The Green Wall, James Wright. (Yale University Press/Oxford University Press, 20/-.)

The New Poets of England and America: An Anthology edited by Donald Hall, Robert Pack and Louis Simpson. (Meridian Books, \$1.45.)

ANYONE who is interested in the way in which Marianne Moore's associative imagination works can do no better than look up, in *The New Yorker* about a year ago, the immense lists of names that she produced when asked by the Ford Motor Company for her help in finding a name for a new model. Kenneth Burke once said: 'if she were discussing the newest model of automobile, I think she could somehow contrive to suggest an antiquarian's interest', and the quaint, strange world of Marianne Moore's fancifully, oddly named cars is as characteristic as the Steinberg world that also fills in columns in *The New Yorker*. Here again in this volume are evocations of this quaint and remote modern

world, in the form of some of Miss Moore's more rococco pieces. These are light, almost joking — pieces about the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team, and Tom Fool, a great racehorse — with the core of statement well out of sight. Marianne Moore was of course associated with the Imagist movement and when I want a poem to point up the virtues of Imagism it is to her early 'No Swan So Fine' that I go. Yet Pound's notion of the image, the intellectual and emotional complex presented in an instant of time, is a point from which Miss Moore has progressively pulled away. Pound's aim was cohesion — a drawing together — and Eliot's objective correlative took the first step away from this cohesion by making of Pound's old image a *modus operandi* less than a thing of the spirit, for what the poet in Eliot's view had to express was not a personality but a particular medium, and this was a means of gauging the distance he had found. Marianne Moore pulled the other way; for her image is spirit and is a world in which the poet lives. Miss Moore's poetry is at once objective and remote from herself in that it is poetry as poetry, poetry as its own form (no one can doubt she has the heightened mode of the poet) and yet it is personal in that its spirit is so much her own. In one sense to speak of Imagism is to speak of her weakest side, which comes out in 'Bulwarked Against Fate', a piece which takes the image-making faculty through the area surrounding the notion of firmness in adversity and a piece to which, I regret to say, I cannot see myself ever becoming reconciled. It is perhaps under-communicative to say that it seems to me that whereas in a long cycle like the *Cantos* Pound's aim was concentration, in a short poem like this one Miss Moore's aim, or effect, is diffusion. Taking the image as a starting point she goes towards the abstract, until there are too many ways of looking at a blackbird. Ideas have a thousand ways of getting into poetry, but when they are there they cease to be ideas as such and partake of the form of the poem. But the poem must have some energy, either the energy of the propositional development of the idea or the energy of the pull between images. In this poem there is neither; and in others, the propositional poems, like 'Values in Use' and 'Style', which make claims to statement, there is accretion by spread of images and not by logical progress. I must say that for me Miss Moore often suddenly goes off-key, as Edith Sitwell does, because of the preciousness or cuteness of her imagination or because she pushes too far into the imagination — a fault I find in many of her animal poems. Other poems possess me completely, for two main reasons: I am convinced of the highest degree of control in the poem, the kind of control that is the product of intellectual and poetic attributes of the highest order working in fusion, and secondly I delight in this beautifully poised tension between the things of life — as she says in her magnificent, well-known poem 'Poetry', 'all these phenomena are important', even down to business documents and school-books — and their place in poetry. In this same poem she takes up Yeats on Blake (he was 'a literalist of the imagination, as 'hers are of nature'), and holds poets to it, meaning to say that the poet must be capable of registering the qualities of the imagination and

of reproducing them as reality. But at the same time she speaks of poetry as presenting for inspection imaginary gardens with real toads in them, and by this I take it she is speaking of three things: of the need to bring out from the imagination to the edge of intellection the things of it, and to subject them to orderly controls; of the need to bring manners and matter into this sphere created by that process; and finally coming down to the simple point of her own technique, of the methods of doing this by quotation out of life—actual citations with quotation marks around, and the correlates of this in her technique, the many effects that give the 'antiquarian' feeling. She starts always from the imagination, and we never have real gardens with imaginary toads. But so much depends on the toads, and only about a half of the poems in this lightweight volume compound the right mixture for me.

James Wright (the American James Wright) is an up-and-comer who has already some reputation in England, and here is his first volume in the Yale Series of Younger Poets. And it is in so many ways a pleasing volume, with a fine introduction by W. H. Auden, splendid presentation and an order which brings out the real flavour of Wright's gift. His theme is, to take it broadly first, that man is a fallen creature, full of sin, thank goodness; and his themes are the lost countryside, the lost summer, the rotting on the ground in autumn. And the wild vital forces loose in the world are, almost, our danger; Wright lyricises about them but at the same time sites them away, in the past, or in another place. The fishermen he writes of have forgotten all the baroque and movement of sea and shore life, and are 'The beaten age, the dead, the blood gone dumb'; the vitality of the horse is cold, and it tosses its rider:

Here it is not enough to pray that loves
Draw grass over our childhood's lake of slime.
Run to the rocks where horses cannot climb,
Stable the daemon back to the shaken earth,
Warm your hands at the comfortable fire,
Cough in a dish beside a wrinkled bed.

('The childhood lake of slime' is here the image out of childhood of being pawed down or frightened by horses.) Wright is torn between a lyricism about the lost childhood or the distant countryside and a proper awareness of its essential remoteness in the spirit; he favours or rejects it according to mood. Auden's comment in the introduction is acute here; he points out that modern man has found 'that he and his society have a self-made history while the rest of nature does not. He is anxious by necessity because at every moment he has to choose to become himself. His typical feelings about nature, therefore, are feelings of estrangement and nostalgia' One of the best poems in the book, 'Arrangement with Earth for Three Dead Friends', sums up the different tastes of life in the three dead, one a child who played at ease in nature, another who gained human ease through music, while the third:

She was aware of scavengers in holes
Of stone, she knew the loosened stones that fell

Indifferently as pebbles plunging down a well
And broke for the sake of nothing human souls.

She knew 'the change of tone, the human hope gone grey' — which is the knowledge that underlies Wright's poems.

The spirit of many of his pieces is a lyrical simplicity which sets the wryness against the charm of what is lost; but he has a dangerous tendency to move out of this simplicity into sentimentality, or to fall too easily, when he is being lyrical, into emotions which are too easily *there* in the poem — a glance at 'To a Hostess Saying Goodnight' or 'A Girl in a Window' will show how the lyricism almost postulates the richnesses, the romanticism, that is to follow. But then in a poem like 'On the Skeleton of a Hound' the elements of his imagination and his skill fuse perfectly. The immediacies of the situation square perfectly with Wright's possibilities and subtleties — the power of description, the object set by death at one remove, the situation of a vital animal brought down and of death as a challenge to life. It is a pity there is not more room to praise Wright for some of his more complex pieces, or to speak of his technical skill (which comes out in the command he has in one of his delightful lighter pieces, like 'A Song for the Middle of the Night') but I want to take up the question of this strain of lyricism we observe in Wright because it is becoming an important strain in new American poetry.

This new paperback anthology, *The New Poets of England and America*, makes the strain clearer. Not that it was not to be found before in American verse, in Robert Frost and Robinson Jeffers and Marianne Moore herself. But this is a question of pitch; I would characterise it as the reverse of the witty poetry that also forms much of the spirit of modern poetry in English, in that it offers up a simple face, a nice naivete that is almost Milne-like at times — take Donald Justice's 'In Bertram's Garden':

Jane looks down at her organdy skirt
As if *it* somehow were the thing disgraced
For being there, on the floor, in the dirt
And she catches it up about her waist,
Smooths it out along one hip,
And pulls it over the crumpled slip.

On the porch, green-shuttered, cool,
Asleep is Bertram, that bronze boy . . .

But of course what Jane and Bertram have done is not out of A. A. Milne, and no more is the naivete. For in the end it presupposes the same sophistication that the witty pieces do. One of the needs of wit is for formal principles, methods of order, and this too is to be found in most cases in the new lyricism. Wright is not so much on the edge of wit as some; if you look up the Spring, 1957, *Listen* (II, 2) you will find him, in 'At a Girl's Grave in Ohio', really, so to speak, pushed to his edge. Whether a poem about a dead whore can carry this much intensity is a

matter of taste, but there can be no doubt that we haven't easily accepted poems pitched like this recently.

It is not surprising that Wright, who haunts the dead so much, should taste of the *Spoon River Anthology* occasionally; and he does forge his personality by the narrowness and exactitude of his poetic interests. The matter for speculation lies in the general possibilities of an extension of this spirit; does it take us a step further in the history of twentieth-century poetry? As I have said, there is an American tradition on these lines, and yet I can't help thinking that the editors are, at least in their selection from the younger English poets, biased in its favour. Yet I remember that, in the days when I was on the editorial staff of a small American literary review, we received a host of verse of this temper; it was that or Rexroth-like or Whitman-esque or it was witty. The witty, or then the baroque, the fantastic over-decorated pieces that several younger American poets do so well, were the safest; as soon as tone was lost you spotted it. Editors do alter cases. And when the editors here come to look for this wry lyricism in new English poetry, an area in which they confess themselves to be a little uncertain (they are all young American poets of promise), they err on the side of generosity. It is not crabbed adherence to the bias that this journal may seem to have that makes me wonder whether Jon Manchip White's evocations of the age of chivalry or the mannered cabinet exercises of William Bell ('Maidens who this burning May . . .') represent anything of much interest in the current English poetic scene. Geoffrey Hill, W. S. Graham, John Heath-Stubbs, Keith Douglas and Charles Causley offer better examples of the kind of good poetry that is being written outside 'the movement' today. There are six 'movement' poets represented—as against ten outside it—and here the selection seems to me impeccable. Moreover in the context of young Anglo-American poetry their grip looks as sure as anyone's, their relation to current moods as clear, their statement as mature; and their comparative shortness of range is concealed. Altogether this is a most pleasing anthology, so superior to most collections of immediately contemporary poetry as to be a revelation, a mode of access to a period in which the younger generations of England and America are closer than they have ever been. (Incidentally, the anthology has sold 10,000 copies so far.) It is a pity I haven't space to make it clearer that this is a fascinating and enormously encouraging collection that naturally gives rise to speculation about future prospects in verse. The derivative or 'late' quality of most of the verse, too, ceases to be depressing in the face of enough evidence of range and sheer poetic skill, and in the face of the constant reaffirmation that, to put the recurrent theme, while man's lot is hard and his life a struggle ('Doctors of Science, what is man that he / Should hope to come to a good end? *The best / Is not to have been born.*') his capacity to chart his status and sphere is not impaired by tired conventions and traditions.

Malcolm Bradbury